

Values & Ethics

It is easy to make unethical decisions because it is the easiest or quickest way to decide. Or, the decision is “traditional” and not thought about. You are all leaders within the student community, on the front line, deciding what is good, bad, appropriate and inappropriate for your organization. If you are carrying out the responsibilities of your position, you will have extraordinary influence on each person with whom you interact. You set the tone, you effect change, you are the example.

Definition of Ethics

Some definitions would include:

- Deciding what is right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust
- Making decisions which are consistent with one’s value system and the value system of the organization.
- When encountering the many grey areas in which it is difficult to distinguish right from wrong, there is always an answer that is more right than the others. This is an ethical answer.

Ethics: Deciding what is right (or what is more right) in a particular situation: determining what ought to be; deciding what is consistent with one’s personal or organizational value system.

Management is doing things right .Leadership is doing the right thing. Ethical leadership is doing things right WHILE doing the right thing.

What is an Ethical Decision

- One that is related to a specific content; in the same situation, there may be business ethics, educational ethics and personal ethics (one or more of these may be in conflict)
- One that is best for the organization rather than for the leaders; one that is not self-serving.
- One that is made in the clear and is consistent with full disclosure.
- One that even though it is related to a gray area, where there is really no right or wrong answer, it is one that is more right than wrong.
- One that is honest and based on facts and is consistent with the spirit of rightness and fair play.
- One that is consistent with the values and principles for which the organization and institution stand.
- One that will be the best in both the short and long term for the organization.
- One that can be defended and supported by one’s peers and superiors.
- One that is made in good faith.
- One that you could tell your others you honestly feel good about making.

Five Ethical Principles

1. **Respect Autonomy:** Individuals have the right to decide how they live their lives, as long as their actions do not interfere with the welfare of others. One has the right to act as a free agent, and has the freedom of thought and choice.

2. Do No Harm: The obligation to avoid inflicting either physical or psychological harm on others may be a primary ethical principle.
3. Benefit Others: There is an obligation to improve and enhance the welfare of others, even where such enhancements may inconvenience or limit the freedom of the person offering the assistance.
4. Be Just: To be just in dealing with others assumes equal treatment of all, to afford each individual their due portion, and in general, to observe the Golden Rule.
5. Be Faithful: One should keep promises, tell the truth, be loyal, and maintain respect and civility in human discourse. Only in so far as we sustain faithfulness can we expect to be seen as being trustworthy.

K.S. Kitchener, *Ethical Principles and Ethical Decisions in Student Affairs*, " *Applied Ethics in Student Affairs*

The Five Ps of Ethical Power

1. Purpose: Your objective or intention; a goal.
2. Pride: The sense of satisfaction you receive from your accomplishments, and those individuals of whom you care.
3. Patience: Trust the process!
4. Persistence: Maintaining your commitment and making your actions consistent with your guiding principles.
5. Perspective: The capacity to see what is REALLY important in any situation.

Steps in Making an Ethical Decision

Ethical decision-making is based on sound general decision making principles. The process is extended by the inclusion of ethical and moral values rather than the objective criteria or other kinds of decisions. One model which an ethical leader can use to make an ethical decision is this one:

1. Think through the ethical dilemma that you are facing. Try to identify all of its components as objectively as possible.
2. Think of all the options available to you.
3. Determine which option you believe to be the most ethical .At this point, you may want to make this decision alone, or in consultation with others.
4. Determine how this option can be implemented. Consider potential pitfalls that might have to be overcome.
5. Think of the consequences of your decision. What is the worst thing that could occur? What is the best thing that could occur? Can you accept both of these potential outcomes?

Ethics Check

- Is it legal? Will I be violating civil law or university policy?
- Do I consider this to be an extraordinary situation that demands an unusual response?
- How do I feel about this?
- If a close friend of mine took this action, how would I feel?
- Am I acting fairly? Would I want to be treated this way?
- Is it balanced? Is it fair to all concerned? Does it promote win/win situations?
- Does this situation require that I lie about the process or the results?

- Is the proposed action consistent with past practice?
- Does my conscience bother me?
- Will I have to hide or keep my actions secret? Has someone warned me not to disclose my actions to anyone?
- How will it make me feel about myself? Will it make me proud? Would I feel good if my hometown newspaper published my decision? Would I feel good if my family knew?
- Would I be able to discuss the proposed situation or action with my immediate supervisor? The company president? My family? My constituents? My professors?

Suggestions for Behaving Ethically

If the ethical leader has a clear understanding of his/her own personal ethics, and has a sense of the organization's ethics, then ethical behavior is that which is consistent with these codes.

- Behave in ways that are consistent with your purpose. A clear personal purpose is the foundation for ethical behavior. A clear organizational purpose might enhance ethics as well.
- Behave in ways that you are personally proud of. Self-esteem is a powerful tool for behaving ethically. Self-esteem is personal pride mixed with a fair amount of humility, and this balance creates the confidence to "hang tough" when dealing with ethical dilemmas.
- Behave with patience and with faith in your decision and yourself. Patience helps us to behave in ways that will be the best in the long run, and to avoid the trap of having to have things happen immediately.
- Behave with persistence. This means behaving ethically all of the time-not just when it is convenient to do so. An ethical leader has persistence to stick to her or his purpose and to achieve what she or he envisions.
- Behave in ways that are consistent with what is really important. This means keeping perspective. Perspective allows us to reflect and to see things more clearly so that we can see what is really important to guide our behavior.

Tips for Ethical Leadership

- Ethics is the heart of leadership.
- All leadership is values driven.
- The journey of ethical leadership begins with examining personal values.
- Ethical leadership can be learned in a variety of ways.
- Thoughts and actions must be consistent and congruent.
- Character development is critical in the process of being a good leader.
- All members of the organization have the opportunity and responsibility to participate in exercising ethical choices.
- Everything we do teaches.
- As a leader, you are to uphold a higher standard.
- Know yourself!

S.R. Komives, N. Lucas, T.R. McMahon, *Exploring Leadership: for College Students who Want to Make a Difference*

What is a value?

Values are the principles & priorities which help us make decisions on a daily basis. If you truly value honesty, you will choose to be honest in interactions. If you value family strongly, you will make time in your life for family. If growth is a top value for you, you will make decisions which encourage personal development. These are just a few examples of the multitude of values which one might hold. Values are constantly changing & developing throughout our lives. In childhood, our values are usually the ones held by parents and other adults around us. As we continue to mature, other influences such as peers & the media affect our values. With so many influences telling you what to value, how do you know what is really important to you?

Why is Values Clarification Important?

If values affect so many decisions & actions in our lives, it is best that we understand them & that our behavior is in line with our values. Many professionals say that family is their top value. However, many of these same people make very little time for their families. There is a discrepancy between what they profess to value, and their actions. However, if we make an effort to understand our values, it is easier to keep our priorities in the right order & our actions in line with our beliefs. If you sit down & realize that family is important to you, you are most likely to make the time for your family. Values clarification simply refers to any process a person might go through to discover and clarify their values and to bring values in line with behavior.

How to clarify your values

- List twenty possible values and rank them from most to least important for you.
- Think of opposing values (honesty vs. white lies) and the situation where they are applicable. Put yourself on a continuum for different situations.
- Make a "Pie Chart" of your top five values and compare it to your calendar. Are you really spending as much time as you would like on your values?
- Attend a values clarification workshop to participate in some great group exercises which will help you clarify your values.
- Ask yourself, "If I only had 24 hours left to live, how would I spend them?"
- Ask the questions below of the values you think you hold.

Full Values

A Full Value is one which is truly and entirely held by a person. Raths, Simon, & Harmin (1996) have developed seven questions to help identify full values. Answering yes to all seven questions defines a full value. When appropriate, an alternative question is seen in the parentheses.

Seven Questions to Identify Full Values

1. Was the value chosen freely (without force or coercion)?
2. Was the value chosen from alternatives (or was it the only choice)?
3. Was the value chosen after considerations of the consequences of this value?
4. Do you cherish the value? In other words, does the value make you happy?
5. Are you willing to publicly affirm that this is a value to hold?
6. Are you acting on the value (or is it just something that is said)?
7. Do you display this value repeatedly and consistently?

Find these helpful resources in the Leadership Library

Credibility by James Kouzes & Barry Posner

Principle-Centered Leadership by Stephen Covey